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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

EASTERN AMONG AMERICA'S BEST COLLEGES

CHARLESTON -- Eastern Illinois University continues to be among the best public universities in the Midwest, according to *U.S. News and World Report's* annual guide to "America's Best Colleges," which ranks universities, liberal arts colleges and some specialized schools nationwide.

Eastern is ranked 38th, placing it at the top level of the second tier of four tiers among 123 regional universities in the Midwest. The only other Illinois public university listed in the second tier of the Midwest regional universities is Western Illinois University. Larger universities such as the University of Illinois, Illinois State University, Southern Illinois University (Carbondale) and Northern Illinois University are ranked separately as national universities.

The rankings were based on schools' academic reputation, student selectivity, faculty resources, graduation and retention rates, financial resources and alumni giving.

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"We are pleased that Eastern Illinois University has consistently ranked in the second tier, or quartile, of the Midwest regionals (thus always above the median)," said Eastern President Carol D. Surles.

"This recognition acknowledges continued efforts by the university's faculty and staff to provide quality education to our students. Eastern's greatest strengths continue to be its strong academic reputation, high retention and graduation rates, small classes, low student to faculty ratio, high percentage of full-time teaching faculty and increasing average ACT scores of our entering freshmen," Surles added.

Of the 123 Midwestern regional universities, Eastern ranked ninth with its six-year graduation rate of 66 percent and freshman-to-sophomore retention rate of 81 percent.

Eastern placed first among Midwestern regional universities having the smallest debt among its 1998 graduates. Only 53 percent of those students owed money, and the average debt was only \$2,450. Minnesota State University in Mankato came in second, with an average debt of \$7,837 for the same class.

Director of Financial Aid Jone Zieren said Eastern's exceptional debt rating may be due, in part, to the sensible borrowing of Eastern students and debt-counseling services, which include both personal counseling and web access to debt counseling. Illinois also has one of the largest state scholarship programs in the nation -- the Illinois Student Assistance Commission Monetary Award Program -- which may also lessen the

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AMERICA'S BEST COLLEGES

amount of debt Eastern students incur, she said.

Surles added, "Ultimately, we would hope that prospective students choose not to base their decision to consider and/or to attend Eastern solely on these rankings, but rather on a combination of factors including a campus visit; talking with friends, family, alumni, faculty and staff; and discovering all that the university offers in the way of financial aid, academic support services and more."

The *U.S. News and World Report's* 2000 Guide to "America's Best Colleges" (published this month) will be available on the newsstands in September. The rankings are available online at www.usnews.com.